

Copy of the Fifteenth Amendment Sent to North Carolina, 1869

The State of North Carolina

Executive Department

Raleigh March 4th, 1869

To the Honorable General Assembly of North Carolina:

Gentlemen: I have received from the Hon. William H. Seward, Secretary of State of the United States and herewith transfer to your honorable body, "an attested copy of a Resolution of Congress, proposing to the legislatures of the several states a fifteenth article to the Constitution of the United States."

The proposed fifteenth article is in the following words:

"A Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of the United States."

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled (two-thirds concurring) that the following article be proposed to the legislatures of the Several states as an Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which when ratified by three-fourths of said Legislatures shall be valid as part of the Constitution namely,

Article XV

Fifteenth Amendment Circular, May 4, 1869, Accession 43756, Henry Wells Executive Papers, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

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Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2.

The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

By the adoption of the proposed article by three-fourths of the states the right to vote will be secured by the Constitution of the United States to every citizen and will not, therefore, depend, as it does now, on the will of the several states. The best, if not the only form of just government known among men, is that which secures to all the absolute equality in political and civil rights. It results inevitably from the formation of

governments by persons equally free that everyone should have the right to vote--that is to have a voice in the administration of government to which is entrusted their lives, their liberties and their properties of all. The people of the United States are all free. They all have an interest in society and every male citizen should have the right to vote. This right should be as lasting as the Constitution itself and as general and pervasive as the atmosphere of each state. The colored citizen in New York or Connecticut is as much entitled to it as the colored citizen in North Carolina or Georgia. Every type of man who is a citizen of the United States is presumed to be capable of self-government. There can be no distinction in this respect between the Caucasian, Mongolian, and the Ethiopian or the subordinate or modified types derived from either or all of these. They are all men. None of them acknowledge masters, but they are all free to seek happiness in their own way so long as they do not infringe on the rights of others. Political slavery would not be less oppressive or depressing to them than what has been known in this country as African or domestic slavery. The gift of freedom to the colored race of the United States would be worse than worthless if not accompanied by the right of suffrage.

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The people of North Carolina has already by a large majority secured to every citizen by organic law the right of suffrage. It is not probable that this law will be impaired or even modified, so long as the Republican Party remains united and controls the legislative department of government. But it is hoped from abundant caution and as a matter of principle that the Legislature of every State will promptly ratify this amendment settling the question for all time.

Those who are at present charged with governments of the recently reconstructed states have devolved upon them a duty in relation to the colored population which is more responsible and delicate, in many respects, than that which is incumbent on any state not formerly slave holding. This population, faithful, patriotic and honest, as it is, has needed and still needs training in the art of self-government

which is the birthright of every white American; and the children of his population must be educated in the midst of and educated equally with children of the latter as such a way as to not do injustice to either race or excite the prejudices of one against the other. The governments of the states, resting as they do on both races, and with men of both races holding offices in their various departments have engaged with alacrity and cheerfulness in the performance of this duty, and it is their fixed purpose to omit no effort that may be deemed necessary to educate, improve and elevate the colored people whose interest and happiness have been committed to their charge. But while this duty is thus performed to large masses who have just emerged from slavery, it is expected that other states not formerly encumbered by slavery and which the colored people are few in numbers and generally intelligent, will promptly and without a single exception, ratify the proposed amendment, thus fixing the full right of citizenship for all in the Constitution itself, and placing it where no future changes or convulsion can destroy it.

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I earnestly recommend gentlemen that the proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States be ratified by your honorable body.

I have the honor to be

With great respect

Your obedient servant

W.W. HOLDEN

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